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Riparian Restoration Guide Released by New Mexico Experts

ALBUQUERQUE, NM - The U.S. Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts have released “A Guide for Planning Riparian Treatments in New Mexico” for conservationists who are providing planning and design assistance in treating riparian areas. This guide is an important step as New Mexico conservationists seek to recover the state’s streams and rivers from salt cedar and Russian olive infestations.

“Once salt cedar and Russian olive infestations are removed nature will try to fill the vacuum with native plant species and other noxious and invasive plant species adapted to the modified site,” said George Chavez, NRCS resources conservationist. “Most of these sites need intervention by way of weed control and the reintroduction of native plants. For those that are truly riparian sites and need intervention, the traditional method of planting shrubs and trees does not work. Riparian plants are dependent on a continuous water source that is only achieved when the roots are in contact with seepage from the adjacent stream or river.”

According to Chavez, success is achieved by deep planting long-stem specimens, not traditional shallow-rooted plants, and using special equipment to auger six to seven foot holes so roots reach the capillary fringe of the water table.

Once the fledgling restoration species are planted, weeds like seven to eight foot kochia and dense sunflower patches can block out the sun and kill them. Large insect infestations, like cottonwood beetles with a peaking population, can also destroy a newly rehabilitated site.

“The New Mexico Soil & Water Conservation Districts have been providing several demonstration sites across the state with monitoring and pest control for the first two years – after which it will be possible to walk away,” Chavez said.

NRCS will be installing addition demonstration sites this year, and is continuing to provide government and private groups with technological advances in native plant management.

“A Guide for Planning Riparian Treatments in New Mexico” is available at your local NRCS and Soil & Water Conservation District offices and is on the web at www.nm.nrcs.usda.gov

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